

## Message Text

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ORIGIN PA-02

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 MMO-04 EB-08 SP-02 AF-10 ARA-14  
EA-12 EUR-12 NEA-10 USIA-15 DODE-00 SIG-02 /092 R

DRAFTED BY PA/M:JACOLLINGE:REB  
APPROVED BY PA:HCARTERIII  
M/MO/R  
DESIRED DISTRIBUTION  
PA/M, AF, ARA, EA, EB, EUR, NEA, OCT, S/P  
-----036227 161815Z /53  
R 152116Z PEB 78  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
TO ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS

UNCLAS STATE 040176

FOR CONSULS, POL, ECON OFFICERS, ALSO PASS USIS, DOD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN

SUBJECT: CURRENT AMERICAN OPINION 8

1. SUMMARY. THIS IS THE EIGHTH EDITION OF "CURRENT AMERICAN OPINION," (CAO) AND THE FIRST FORWARDED BY CABLE SO THAT POSTS MAY SPEEDILY RECEIVE INFORMATION OTHERWISE UNAVAILABLE. CAO IS DESIGNED TO INFORM FOREIGN SERVICE PERSONNEL OVERSEAS ABOUT CURRENT AMERICAN ATTITUDES THAT CAN AFFECT NATIONAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION. IT IS INTENDED PARTICULARLY FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICERS.

2. COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENT AND UTILITY ARE URGED.

3. IN THIS ISSUE:  
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-- PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN U.S. INSTITUTIONS CONTINUES ITS SLOW RESURGENCE, ALTHOUGH THE NOTABLE INCREASE OF TRUST IN THE THREE BRANCHES OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT THAT OCCURRED DURING 1976 SLOWED APPRECIABLY IN 1977.

-- THE PRESIDENT RECEIVES MAJORITY APPROVAL. BUT MORE HAVE CONFIDENCE IN HIM, PERSONALLY, THAN APPROVE HIS PERFORMANCE. HIS OVERSEAS TRIP HAD NO DISCERNIBLE

EFFECT ON HIS POPULARITY.

-- THE PUBLIC IS OVERWHELMINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE ECONOMY. ALTHOUGH WORRIED ABOUT INFLATION, AMERICANS FAVOR RESTRICTING CHEAPER FOREIGN GOODS AS A WAY OF MAINTAINING U.S. EMPLOYMENT.

-- DESPITE PREOCCUPATION WITH DOMESTIC MATTERS, AMERICANS REMAIN FUNDAMENTALLY INTERNATIONALIST IN OUTLOOK.

-- MORE AMERICANS EXPECT CHINESE AND SOVIET POWER TO INCREASE DURING 1978 THAN PREDICT A RISE IN U.S. POWER. NEVERTHELESS, A PREPONDERANCE OF THE PUBLIC SEES THE U.S. AS THE LEADING SUPERPOWER. END SUMMARY.

4. PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN A VARIETY OF INSTITUTIONS, WHICH SHARPLY DECLINED IN THE LATE 1960S AND REACHED ITS LOWEST RECORDED POINT IN EARLY 1976, CONTINUES ITS SLOW RESURGENCE.

5. HARRIS RECENTLY REPORTED A MODEST GAIN IN THE TRUST WITH WHICH AMERICANS VIEW BASIC NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AS COMPARED TO TWO YEARS AGO. THE LONE EXCEPTION IS THE UNCLASSIFIED

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PRESS, WHICH REMAINS AT ITS 1976 NADIR. NONE HAVE RETURNED TO THE LEVEL OF TRUST ENJOYED A DECADE AGO.

6. HARRIS PERIODICALLY ASKS RESPONDENTS WHETHER THEY HAVE A "GREAT DEAL," SOME, OR "VERY LITTLE" CONFIDENCE IN ABOUT 15 INSTITUTIONS. THOSE RESPONDING THEY FELT A "GREAT DEAL" OF CONFIDENCE IN SOME OF THE MORE SIGNIFICANT INSTITUTIONS WERE:

	11/77	2/77	2/76	3/66	
WHITE HOUSE	26	31	11		NOT ASKED
EXECUTIVE BRANCH		23	23	11	41
CONGRESS	15	17	9	42	
SUPREME COURT		31	29	22	55
THE MILITARY		31	27	23	62
MAJOR COMPANIES		23	20	16	55
LABOR	15	14	10	22	
ORGANIZED RELIGION		34	29	24	41
MEDICINE	55	43	42	73	
PRESS	19	18	20	29	

7. IN CONTRAST TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS, CONFIDENCE IN THE WHITE HOUSE HAS DECLINED SINCE EARLY 1977 BY A LARGE ENOUGH MARGIN TO BE STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT.

8. AFTER ONE YEAR IN OFFICE, PRESIDENT CARTER'S PER-

FORMANCE WINS THE APPROVAL OF A MAJORITY OF THE PUBLIC

(57 VS. 27 PERCENT), ACCORDING TO THE LATEST GALLUP MEASUREMENT. THE CURRENT RATING REFLECTS AN 18-POINT DECLINE IN POPULARITY FROM THE ZENITH OF MID-MARCH 1977. THEN, 75 PERCENT APPROVED HIS PERFORMANCE; 10 PERCENT DISAPPROVED.

9. NONETHELESS, GALLUP FOUND 82 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC EXPRESSES CONFIDENCE IN "PRESIDENT CARTER, THE MAN."  
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ONLY 13 PERCENT CLAIM "HARDLY ANY" CONFIDENCE IN HIM. THIS DIVERGENCE BETWEEN THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF CARTER'S PERSONAL QUALITIES AND HIS HANDLING OF THE PRESIDENCY HAS BEEN REVEALED IN OPINION SURVEYS OVER MUCH OF THE PAST YEAR.

10. THE PRESIDENT'S TRIP ABROAD APPARENTLY DID NOT AFFECT HIS POPULARITY RATINGS. (AS WE REPORTED EARLIER, A REVIEW OF 35 PRESIDENTIAL TRIPS ABROAD BETWEEN 1953-1971 SHOWS THAT MOST HAD LITTLE OR NO EFFECT ON THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DOMESTIC POPULARITY AS MEASURED BY GALLUP POLLS TAKEN SHORTLY BEFORE AND AFTER THE TRIPS.)

11. CBS REPORTS THAT A MAJORITY GAVE PRESIDENT CARTER HIGH MARKS FOR HIS OVERSEAS PERFORMANCE (56 PERCENT). BUT THE PUBLIC WAS EQUALLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THOSE WHO THOUGHT THE JOURNEY WOULD IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE NATIONS HE VISITED AND THOSE WHO THOUGHT IT WOULD "MAKE NO DIFFERENCE" (43 TO 45 PERCENT). JUST FOUR PERCENT THOUGHT IT WOULD HARM RELATIONS.

12. NBC REPORTS THAT 76 PERCENT OF THOSE SURVEYED JUST AFTER THE TRIP SAID THEIR OPINIONS OF THE PRESIDENT HAD NOT CHANGED AS A RESULT OF HIS MISSION. TWELVE PERCENT SAID THEIR VIEWS BECAME MORE FAVORABLE, A PROPORTION NEARLY BALANCED BY THE NINE PERCENT WHO SAID THEY GREW LESS FAVORABLE.

13. AS HAS BEEN THE CASE SINCE THE END OF THE VIET-NAM WAR, THE PUBLIC ISSUES THAT MOST CONCERN AMERICANS ARE THOSE RELATED TO DOMESTIC PROBLEMS. IN A RECENT GALLUP POLL, OVER A THIRD OF THE PUBLIC CITED INFLATION AS "THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING THIS COUNTRY TO-  
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DAY" (35 PERCENT). A QUARTER SAID UNEMPLOYMENT WAS THE MOST SERIOUS (24 PERCENT) AND JUST UNDER ONE-FIFTH BELIEVED IT WAS ENERGY SUPPLIES (18 PERCENT).

14. FOREIGN POLICY RANKED A DISTANT FOURTH IN PUBLIC

CONCERN (SEVEN PERCENT) AND CRIME WAS FIFTH (FIVE PERCENT).

15. ALTHOUGH CONCERNED ABOUT INFLATION, THE PUBLIC CONTINUES TO SUPPORT TRADE POLICIES AIMED AT PROTECTING U.S. JOBS. A RECENT ROPER SURVEY SHOWED THAT SENTIMENT FOR TRADE RESTRICTIONS HAD REMAINED STABLE DURING THE PAST FOUR YEARS. THE PUBLIC CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT CURBS SHOULD BE PLACED ON IMPORTS "PRICED LOWER THAN AMERICAN-MADE GOODS OF THE SAME KIND" (64 VS. 26 PERCENT).

16. THE MOST WIDELY EXPRESSED REASON FOR RESTRICTIONS IS "MORE JOBS FOR AMERICANS": 74 PERCENT THINK THAT IS A GOOD ARGUMENT FOR A PROTECTIONIST POLICY, UP 19 PERCENTAGE POINTS SINCE 1973.

17. AN OVERWHELMING PROPORTION OF THE PUBLIC WORRIES ABOUT RISING FOOD COSTS AND BLAMES THIS FOR INCREASES IN THE COST OF LIVING (82 PERCENT).

18. NONETHELESS, A HARRIS POLL IN JANUARY FOUND THE SAME PROPORTION EXPRESSING SYMPATHY WITH THE PLIGHT OF THE AMERICAN FARMER (80 PERCENT). THIS PROBABLY STEMS FROM THE PERCEPTION THAT THE FARMER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR FOOD COSTS: 87 PERCENT AGREED THAT "MIDDLEMEN MAKE MOST OF THE PROFITS."

19. THOSE SURVEYED CLAIMED WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT A FIVE PERCENT INCREASE IN THE PRICE OF FOOD TO HELP ACHIEVE FARM PRICE PARITY (54 VS. 36 PERCENT). BUT THIS UNCLASSIFIED

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RESPONSE IS LIKELY MORE REFLECTIVE OF PUBLIC SYMPATHY THAN IT IS OF FIRM SUPPORT FOR SUCH AN INCREASE. HARRIS FOUND VERY CLEAR OPPOSITION TO A SOMEWHAT HIGHER PRICE RISE: A 69 TO 19 PERCENT MAJORITY REFUSED TO PAY 10 PERCENT MORE FOR FOOD.

20. THE HARRIS DATA POINTS UP THE NATURE OF THE POLITICAL PROBLEM CONCERNING FARM PRICES: PUBLIC SYMPATHY FOR FARMERS FAILS TO PRODUCE SUPPORT FOR A SOLUTION SHOULD IT REQUIRE SUBSTANTIAL INCREASES IN FOOD COSTS.

21. DESPITE PREOCCUPATION WITH DOMESTIC MATTERS, AMERICANS REMAIN ESSENTIALLY COMMITTED TO AN ACTIVE WORLD ROLE. KETTERING POLLS OF FIVE MAJOR CITIES DURING 1977 FOUND THE PUBLIC DISAGREEING THAT THE COUNTRY WOULD BE "BETTER OFF" IF IT STAYED OUT OF WORLD AFFAIRS (AN AVERAGE OF 60 VS. 29 PERCENT).

22. MORE AMERICANS EXPECT CHINESE AND SOVIET POWER TO

INCREASE DURING THE COURSE OF THIS YEAR THAN ANTICIPATE  
GROWTH IN U.S. INFLUENCE.

23. GALLUP REPORTS THAT A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS THINK  
CHINESE POWER WILL GROW DURING THE YEAR (56 PERCENT),  
VIRTUALLY THE SAME PROPORTION WHO PREDICTED 1977  
INCREASES. SLIGHTLY FEWER EXPECT SOVIET INFLUENCE TO  
GROW: 53 PERCENT, DOWN NINE POINTS FROM 1977 PREDIC-  
TIONS.

24. AMERICANS ARE LESS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT U.S. POWER:  
42 PERCENT FORESEE GROWTH, DOWN 15 POINTS FROM LAST  
YEAR.

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25. THE PROPORTION EXPECTING A DECLINE IN EITHER U.S.  
OR SOVIET POWER REMAINS IDENTICAL TO 1977 PREDICTIONS  
(25 AND 16 PERCENT, RESPECTIVELY). SLIGHTLY FEWER  
EXPECT CHINESE POWER TO DECREASE THAN DID LAST YEAR (11  
VS. 16 PERCENT).

26. ONLY ONCE IN 18 YEARS HAS A PREPONDERANCE OF THE  
PUBLIC PREDICTED A DECLINE IN U.S. SWAY. EXACTLY  
HALF OF THE PUBLIC ANTICIPATED 1974 WOULD BE A YEAR OF  
SHRINKING U.S. WORLD INFLUENCE WHILE 29 PERCENT PRE-  
DICTED GROWTH. AMERICANS HAVE NEVER PREDICTED A  
DECLINE IN EITHER SOVIET OR CHINESE POWER.

27. ASKED TO EVALUATE THE RELATIVE POWER OF THE UNITED  
STATES, THE SOVIET UNION, AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF  
CHINA, RESPONDENTS PREDOMINANTLY RATED THE U.S. AS  
FIRST AND CHINA A DISTANT THIRD.

	AMONG MOST POWERFUL	EQUAL TO THE MOST	AMONG OTHER LARGE NATIONS	LEAST POWERFUL
	PERCENT			
UNITED STATES	34	50	13	1
SOVIET UNION	8	68	16	1
CHINA	3	34	43	9

28. THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME GALLUP POSED THIS QUESTION,  
SO CHANGES IN PUBLIC PERCEPTION CANNOT BE TRACED. VANCE

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## Message Attributes

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**Capture Date:** 26 sep 1999  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** n/a  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 15 feb 1978  
**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** n/a  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:**  
**Disposition Date:** 01 jan 1960  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** PA/M:JACOLLINGE:REB  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** N/A  
**Errors:** n/a  
**Expiration:**  
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**Office:** ORIGIN PA  
**Original Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 5  
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**Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** n/a  
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**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 17 feb 2005  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**SAS ID:** 3475612  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** <DBA CORRECTED> gwr 970822  
**Subject:** CURRENT AMERICAN OPINION 8  
**TAGS:** APUB, SOPN, APUB, SOPN  
**To:** ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS  
**Type:** TE  
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**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
20 Mar 2014  
**Markings:** Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014